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## Women War Artists in the Canadian War Museum Collection, 1914-1945: Treasures from the Paper Vault

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CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

# Women War Artists in the Canadian War Museum Collection, 1914-1945

## Treasures from the Paper Vault

STACEY BARKER

*Abstract: While most Canadian war art of the First and Second World War was produced by male artists, a handful of women artists were commissioned to capture their own impressions of these conflicts. This piece highlights eight works by four such artists: Caroline Armington, Alma Duncan, Bobs (Zema) Cogill Haworth, and Pegi Nicol MacLeod. All are works on paper and all are part of the Canadian War Museum's Beaverbrook Collection of War Art.*

*Résumé: Bien que la plus grande part de l'art militaire canadien des Première et Seconde Guerres mondiales ait été produite par des hommes, il a été demandé à quelques femmes artistes d'exprimer leurs impressions de ces conflits. Le présent article met en lumière huit œuvres de quatre femmes artistes : Caroline Armington, Alma Duncan, Bobs (Zema) Cogill Haworth et Pegi Nicol MacLeod. Il s'agit d'œuvres sur papier qui font toutes partie de la Collection d'art militaire Beaverbrook du Musée canadien de la guerre.*

HUNDREDS OF ARTISTS recorded Canada's participation in the world wars, but only a handful were female. This fact is reflected in the Canadian War Museum's Beaverbrook Collection of War Art. For the most part, the women who sketched and painted the wars did so unofficially, and their work reflects activity on the home front rather than scenes of battle.

The majority of artworks held in the Beaverbrook Collection are on paper, and tend to be exhibited less often than the more physically stable works on canvas. The paper vault nevertheless contains many

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excellent pieces, seldom seen by the public, that illustrate key portions of Canada's military history.

The following are all works on paper held by the Canadian War Museum; all are by women, and all reflect their own personal, artistic impressions of Canada and Canadians in the world wars.

### **CAROLINE ARMINGTON (1875-1939)**

Born in Brampton, Ontario, Caroline Armington spent several decades in Paris, where she took up etching and printmaking. A trained nurse as well as an artist, she worked at the American Ambulance Hospital during the First World War. In 1918, she received a commission from the Canadian War Memorials Fund and produced two etchings. The approach of another war in 1939 forced Armington and her husband to leave Europe for New York. In ill-health, she died shortly after they arrived.



*No. 8 Canadian General Hospital, St. Cloud, France.* At first glance, this appears to be a bucolic street scene, but the men in uniform and the nursing sisters suggest otherwise. This 1918 print shows the No. 8 Canadian General Hospital, located on the outskirts of Paris. It was one of many military hospitals set up to deal with the enormous number of casualties produced by the First World War. [Canadian War Museum 19910216-361]



*British Army and Navy Leave Club, Place de la République, Paris, France.* In this 1918 work, Armington takes as her subject the recently-established British Army and Navy Leave Club. It gave soldiers and sailors on leave in Paris a place to sleep and eat, and was a welcome respite from the hardships of the trenches. [Canadian War Museum 19710261-0009]

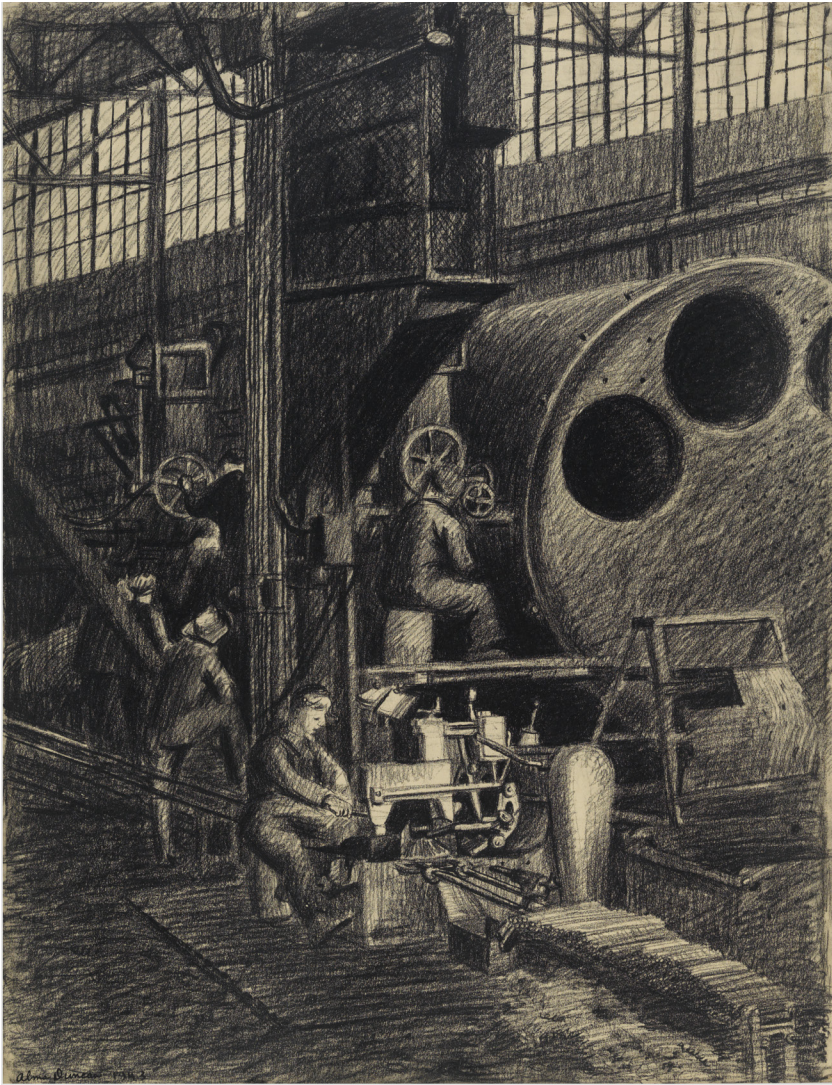


### ALMA DUNCAN (1917-2004)

Alma Duncan's artistic career spanned many genres, including painting, animation, graphic art, and printmaking. During the Second World War, Duncan became an unofficial war artist. Using credentials obtained through the Federation of Canadian Artists, she sketched industrial activity on the home front, as well as members of the Canadian Women's Army Corps.



*Rivetting Ships' Boilers.* [Canadian War Museum 19710261-5925]



*Interior of Boiler Shop (Ship Building).* The Second World War created a demand for ships that Canada helped fill. Duncan, who had a long fascination with industrial scenes, chose shipyards as one of her wartime subjects. In these two 1943 sketches depicting a shipbuilding plant, the workers are almost overshadowed by the metal and machinery that surrounds them. [Canadian War Museum 19710261-5926]

**BOBS (ZEMA) COGILL HAWORTH (1900-1988)**

Born in South Africa, Haworth studied at the Royal College of Art in London, England before moving to Canada in 1923. In 1943, Haworth and her husband Peter, also an artist, were commissioned by the National Gallery of Canada to record wartime subjects on the home front. The resulting works, mostly on paper, are colourful reflections of military activity on Canada's coasts.



*Algerines – Eastern Canadian Port – Halifax.* The Royal Navy ship in the foreground is an Algerine-class minesweeper, identifiable by its pennant number 'J333'. The Royal Canadian Navy also had several Algerines in its fleet. [Canadian War Museum 19840283-002]





*Hurricanes, Patricia Bay.* The airfield at Patricia Bay, on Vancouver Island, was constructed as part the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. The site is now home to Victoria International Airport. [Canadian War Museum 19710261-5698]



### PEGI NICOL MACLEOD (1904-1949)

In 1944, Pegi Nicol MacLeod was commissioned by the National Gallery of Canada to record the women's service branches. A prolific artist, MacLeod produced well over 100 works depicting the women of the army, navy, and air force as they trained, worked, and rested. To do this, MacLeod went to Ottawa where she observed the lives of service women. She spent time at the Glebe Barracks, home to the Canadian Women's Army Corps, and the Princess Alice Barracks, where the Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division was stationed.



*Air Woman.* The Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division was the first of the three female service branches to be created. In this scene, the artist draws out their feminine characteristics, showing their military-issue handbags and the distinctive hairstyle adopted by many WDs. [Canadian War Museum 19710261-5730]



*Bulletins at Lunch.* The mess hall at the Glebe Barracks in Ottawa is depicted in this scene. Amid lunchtime bustle, members of the Canadian Women's Army Corps watch as the bulletins for 26 August, 1944 are posted. [Canadian War Museum 19710261-5741]



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Stacey Barker** is a historian at the Canadian War Museum, where she curated the recent exhibitions *World War Women*, and *Preserved in Stone: Underground Art of the First World War*. Dr. Barker's primary research interests deal with the social and cultural history of war, women and war, and memorialization.